

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7263

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

DIA WASHDC

CINCPAC HONOLULU

13TH AIR FORCE/IN CLARK AB

AMCONSUL SONGKHLA

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 15803

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJ: STUDENT CONFRONTATION WITH THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OVER THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

REF: BANGKOK 15768

SUMMARY:

IN REFTTEL WE DESCRIBED THE KEY ACTORS IN THE
"STUDENT"CONFRONTATION WITH THE NLA, AND ALSO TRIED
TO ASCERTAIN THEIR MOTIVES. IN THIS MESSAGE WE DIS-
CUSS POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS CONFRONTATION FOR
THE FUTURE. OVER THE SHORT TERM AT LEAST THERE

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COULD BE INCREASED DIVISION AND MISTRUST BETWEEN THE

MILITARY AND THE CIVILIANS. BOTH SANYA AND KHUKRIT HAVE BEEN TARNISHED BY THEIR PERFORMANCE, AND KHUKRIT PRAMOT'S PRIME MINISTERIAL PROSPECTS APPEAR AT THIS WRITING DOOMED. FOR THE NSCT THIS LATEST FLIRTATION WITH IRRESPONSIBLE POLITICAL ACTIVISM MAY RESULT IN A RETURN TO MODERATION AND A BREAK FROM CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE PDG AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS SUCH AS THIRAYUT BUNMI AND SEKSAN PRASOETKUN. THE NVSCT, BY ADOPTING A MODERATE POSITION, MAY HAVE ENHANCED ITS PRESTIGE AND INDEPENDENT ROLE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS. FINALLY, THE CONSTITUTION WILL REMAIN AN ISSUE FOR THE STUDENTS REGARDLESS OF THE OUTCOME OF THE IMMEDIATE CONFRONTATION. END SUMMARY.

1. OVER THE SHORT TERM AT LEAST, THE PDG-NSCT CONFRONTATION WITH THE NLA WILL PROBABLY RESULT IN INCREASED DIVISION AND MISTRUST BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND THE CIVILIANS. THE MILITARY AND GENERAL KRIT SIWARA ARE THOUGHT TO BE CRITICAL OF SANYA'S HANDLING OF THE RECENT STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS. KHUKRIT'S RECENT ACTIONS HAVE PROBABLY ALSO BEEN UPSETTING. FOR SANYA PERSONALLY SUCH MISTRUST PROBABLY MEANS VERY LITTLE. FOR KHUKRIT IT COULD MEAN A GREAT DEAL. HIS HOPES OF BECOMING PRIME MINISTER DEPEND VERY MUCH ON HIS CAPACITY TO OBTAIN THE SUPPORT OF THE MILITARY. THIS SUPPORT, IN TURN, DEPENDS ON WHETHER THE MILITARY BELIEVES KHUKRIT CAN CONTROL THE PROCESS OF CHANGE IN THE THAI-SOCIO-POLITICAL SYSTEM SO THAT IT WILL NOT THREATEN THE BUSINESS-MILITARY INTERESTS, WHICH ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER FOR THE MILITARY SINCE IT NO LONGER CONTROLS THE POLITICAL SCENE. AT THIS WRITING, KHUKRIT PRAMOT'S PROSPECTS FOR BECOMING THAILAND'S NEXT PRIME MINISTER ARE LESSENERED. CIVILIAN DOMINATED, DEMOCRATICALLY INCLINED GOVERNMENT IN THAILAND CANNOT SURVIVE WITHOUT MILITARY SUPPORT -- AND THIS WILL ONLY BE FORTHCOMING IF THE MILITARY SEES A STRONG GOVERNMENT AND A STRONG CIVILIAN LEADER. NEITHER KHUKRIT NOR SANYA APPEAR TO FIT THE BILL AT THIS TIME.

2. THE CONFRONTATION WILL ALSO RESULT IN INCREASING DISTRUST BETWEEN THE KING AND SOME OF THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.

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THE FAILURE OF STUDENTS TO ADHERE TO THE RULES OF THE GAME DISTURBS THE KING. HE IS INCREASINGLY APPREHENSIVE ABOUT WHAT HE PERCEIVES AS THE ULTIMATE INTENTION OF SOME POLITICAL ACTIVISTS -- THE END OF THE MONARCHY. THE KING HAS FAR LESS TO FEAR FROM THE THAI MILITARY THAN HE DOES THE CURRENT BRAND OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM ESPOUSED BY CERTAIN GROUPS OF STUDENTS AND ACTIVISTS.

3. IN A MORE POSITIVE VEIN, THE CONFRONTATION COULD RESULT IN AN INCREASE IN THE INTEGRITY OF THE NLA. IF THE NLA PASSES THE CONSTITUTION IN ITS PRESENT FORM IT WILL PRESERVE ITS INTEGRITY AND CONTRIBUTE TO THAT OF ITS SUCCESSOR, THIS WILL BE TRUE EVEN IF THE NLA THEN DECIDES TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH ANY OR ALL OF THE CURRENT STUDENT DEMANDS PRIOR TO THE ELECTION. IN FACT, SUCH AN OUTCOME HAS THE ADVANTAGE OF PRESERVING FACE FOR ALL CONCERNED.

4. ULTIMATELY THIS LATEST DISPUTE OVER THE NATURE OF THE CONSTITUTION COULD ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO THE STRENGTH OF CONSTITUTIONALISM IN THAILAND. THE NATURE OF THE NLA DEBATE AND DISCUSSION OF THE CONSTITUTION FOR THE PAST 11 MONTHS ADDS GREATLY TO THE LEGITIMACY OF THIS DOCUMENT. THOUGH NOT SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT IN SUBSTANCE FROM PREVIOUS CONSTITUTIONS, IT HAS GONE THROUGH A PROCESS UNLIKE ANY OF ITS PREDECESSORS. REGARDLESS OF THE IMMEDIATE OUTCOME AND ANY AMENDMENTS THAT MAY RESULT THEREFROM, THE STUDENTS WILL CONTINUE TO USE THE CONSTITUTION AS A KEY RALLYING ISSUE AND REFERENCE POINT IN FUTURE CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE "ESTABLISHMENT" IN THAILAND. THE MILITARY OR ANY OTHER DICTATORIALLY INCLINED LEADER WOULD FIND IT MORE DIFFICULT TO TEAR UP AND THROW AWAY THAN HAS BEEN THE CASE IN THE PAST.

5. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONFRONTATION ON THE FUTURE OF STUDENT POWER FALL INTO SEVERAL AREAS:

A) THE NSCT AND THE NVSCT ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE OF DIFFERENT PATHS REGARDLESS OF ANY APPARENT SHORT TERM EFFORTS AT RECONCILIATION. THE NVSCT HAS DIFFERENT INTERESTS AND A DIFFERENT SUPPORT BASE. ITS EXPERIENCE IN THE CURRENT CONFRONTATION COULD CONTRIBUTE TO A GREATER

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FEELING OF SELF-CONFIDENCE, PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY, AND A DESIRE TO CHART A MORE INDEPENDENT COURSE. THE NVSCT LENT SUPPORT TO THIS BELIEF THROUGH ITS ACTIONS DURING THE INITIAL MAJOR STUDENT EFFORT TO RECONCILE THEIR DIFFERENCES THAT TOOK PLACE ON 29-30 SEPT. 1974 AT KASETSAT UNIVERSITY. APPROXIMATELY 200 STUDENT LEADERS (UNIVERSITY, HIGH SCHOOL, AND VOCATIONAL) FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY MET IN AN NSCT SPONSORED OPEN FORUM TO DISCUSS THE "CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS". WHILE THE STUDENTS IN GENERAL AGREED TO "REACT" IF THE NLA FAILS TO MEET THEIR DEMANDS, THE NVSCT NEVERTHELESS MAINTAINED ITS POSITION IN SUPPORT OF THE NLA. THE NVSCT ALSO CONTINUES TO OPPOSE ANY PRESSURE TACTICS THAT MIGHT CAUSE TROUBLE.

B) THE NSCT LIKEWISE MAY MODERATE ITS ACTIVITIES AND DECIDE THAT THE TIME HAS COME TO REASSESS THE NATURE OF ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH POLITICAL ACTIVISTS SUCH AS THIRAYUT

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BUNMI AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE PDG. THIRAYUT'S THREATS AND THOSE OF THE NSCT ARE ALWAYS DEPENDENT UPON THEIR CAPACITY TO MOBILIZE AND CONTROL THE VOCATIONAL STUDENTS. YET THESE PEOPLE ARE NOW DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED TO THE PDG, THE NSCT AND ALL OTHER POLITICAL ACTIVISTS. HYDE PARK STYLE RALLIES ARE A DISTINCT POSSIBILITY ESPECIALLY IF THEY HAVE BEEN FULLY COORDINATED WITH THE NVSCT IN ADVANCE. BEYOND SUCH RALLIES, WE DO NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT SOME OF THE IRRESPONSIBLE POLITICAL ACTIVISTS WILL, IN THEIR FRUSTRATION

AND RESENTMENT AT THE VOCATIONAL STUDENTS' RECENT STAND, TRY TO PROVOKE VIOLENCE WITH OR BETWEEN ELEMENTS WITHIN THE NVSCT.

C) OVER THE LONGER TERM, IF THE NSCT CAN RESOLVE ITS OWN INTERNAL LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS, WE EXPECT TO SEE UNIVERSITY STUDENT REALIGNMENT INTO AT LEAST A LOOSE COALITION. THE MEETING AT KASETSAT UNIVERSITY REFERRED TO IN PARA 5 A ABOVE IS A CASE IN POINT. THE OCTOBER 14 OBSERVANCES WHICH WILL INCLUDE CREMATION CEREMONIES FOR THE VICTIMS OF THE 14 OCT. 1973 UPRISING MAY SERVE TO BRING STUDENTS TOGETHER. BEYOND THE OCTOBER 14 OBSERVANCES WE EXPECT THE CONSTITUTION TO CONTINUE TO BE OF CONCERN TO THE STUDENTS AND DRAW THEM TOGETHER. THERE WILL BE OTHER ISSUES AND ACTIVITIES THAT MAY CONTRIBUTE TO THE REDEVELOPMENT OF CONSTRUCTIVE AND CREATIVE STUDENT POWER. SOME OF THESE ARE:

-- POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING WILL BEGIN IN EARNEST AFTER PROMULGATION OF THE CONSTITUTION ON OCT. 8 AND MAY PROVIDE AN ALTERNATIVE OUTLET FOR STUDENT POLITICAL ACTIVISM. STUDENTS WILL WATCH CANDIDATES. THEY CAN BE EXPECTED TO QUERY AND CRITICIZE THEM. WE EXPECT TO SEE STUDENT GROUPS GOING TO RURAL AREAS AND PREPARING VILLAGERS TO ASK THE CANDIDATES HARD QUESTIONS CONCERNING, FOR EXAMPLE, LAND TENURE PROBLEMS, THE PRICE OF PADDY, LOAN SHARKS, AND INCOME DISTRIBUTION.

-- THE AMERICAN PRESENCE WILL CERTAINLY BE AN ISSUE. ON THIS POINT THE NSCT AND NVSCT ARE ALREADY IN APPARENT AGREEMENT. IT CAN ALSO SERVE AS A CONVENIENT RALLYING POINT FOR SOME OF THE YOUNGER POLITICAL ACTIVISTS WHO ARE CONTINUING TO TRY TO BUILD POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS. STUDENTS WILL RAISE QUESTIONS ON THE U.S. PRESENCE DURING

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THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND THEY CAN BE EXPECTED TO ASK CANDIDATES WHAT THEIR STAND IS ON THE CURRENT STUDENT DEMAND THAT THE PARLIAMENT SHOULD HAVE FINAL AUTHORITY TO PASS ON STATIONING OF FOREIGN TROOPS IN THAILAND OR SENDING THAI TROOPS ABROAD.

-- AFTER THE ELECTIONS IN FEB. 1975, PARLIAMENT ITSELF WILL AGAIN BECOME A TARGET FOR STUDENT ACTIVISTS, THOUGH PERHAPS IN A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE WAY. PARLIAMENTARIANS WILL BE REMINDED OF THEIR CAMPAIGN PROMISES, WELL PUBLICIZED STUDENT/LABOR/FARMER HYDE PARK RALLIES WILL BE A COMMON OCCURRENCE.

-- FINALLY, EDUCATIONAL REFORM TOWARD MORE RELEVANT CURRICULUM WILL ALSO BECOME AN ISSUE FOR THE STUDENTS. IT IS POSSIBLE IN FACT THAT IT WILL BECOME AN OVERRIDING ISSUE AND STUDENTS MAY EVEN PRESSURE PARLIAMENT TO STEP IN AND REQUIRE THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION TO BE MORE FORTHCOMING IN THIS AREA.

6. THESE ARE THE PRIMARY CAUSES AROUND WHICH STUDENTS CAN RALLY, COMPETE OR OTHERWISE AGITATE. NONE OF THEM REQUIRES TOTAL UNITY WITHIN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT IN ORDER FOR STUDENTS TO HAVE POLITICAL IMPACT, ALBEIT NEGATIVE. THESE CAUSES DO, HOWEVER, NEED GROUPS WITH COMMITMENT AND ENDURANCE WHOSE PRIMARY TECHNIQUES WILL PROBABLY BE HYDE PARK RALLIES, LETTERS, AND WELL-PUBLICIZED DELEGATIONS WITH PETITIONS FOR THE PRIME MINISTER OR PARLIAMENTARIANS. MASTERS

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